GENERATION X

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SCOTT LOBDELL
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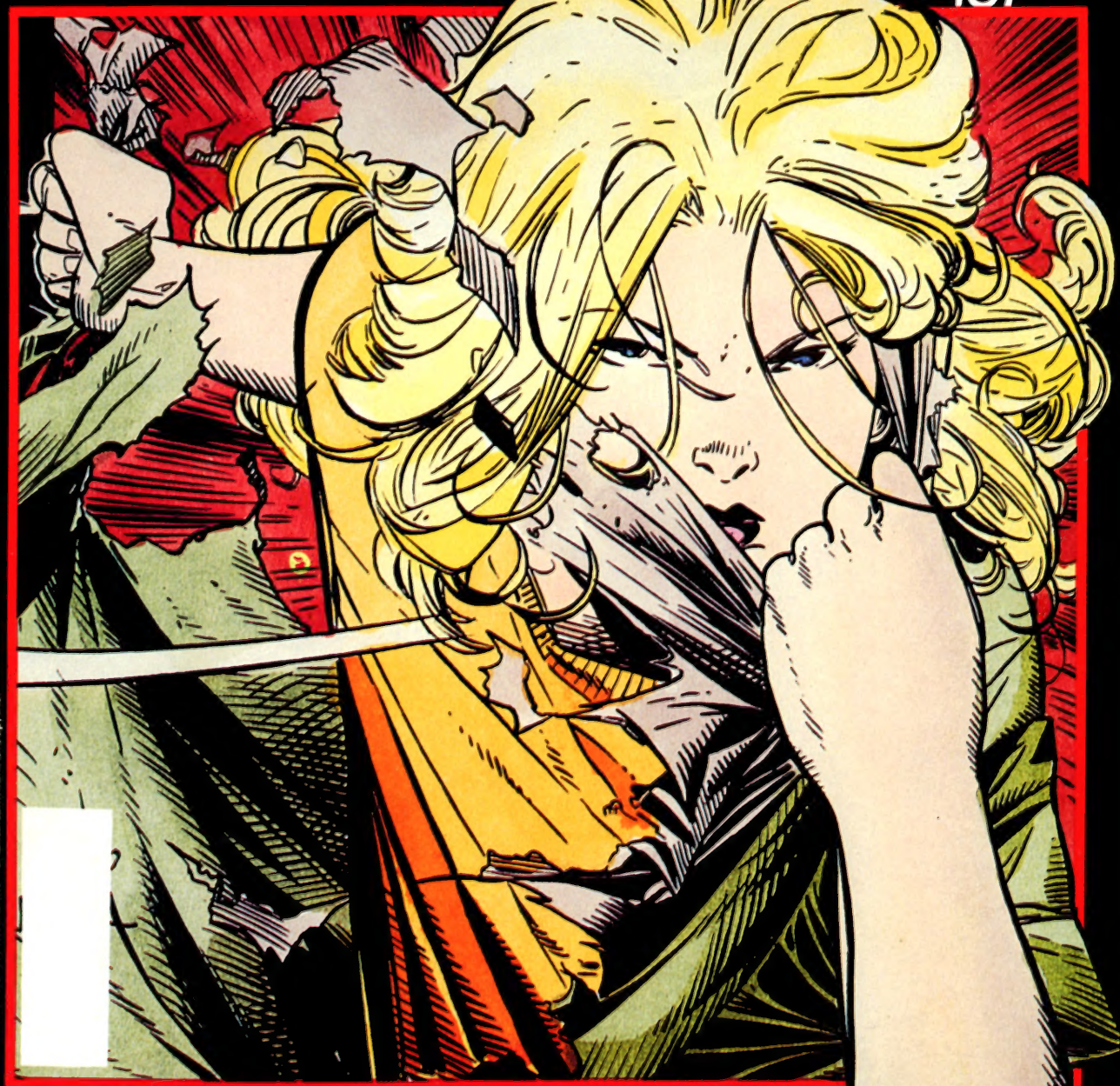

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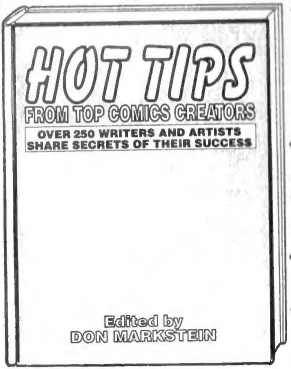

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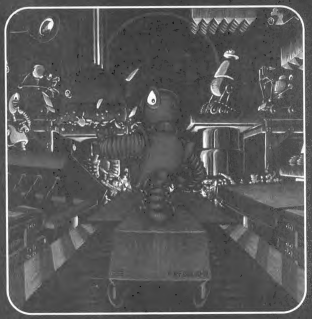

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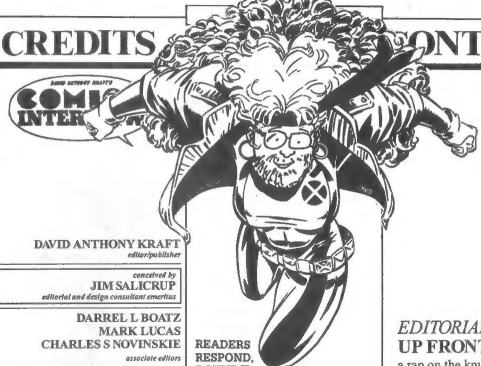

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READERS RESPOND, ROUND II

Reader response to the survey included with INTERVIEW #134's roundtable discussion on the current comics industry crisis continues to come into our offices.

One such survey response, so explicit, in-depth and detailed as to warrant close scrutiny for the breadth and depth of its response, is included virtually verbatim in this issue's letters column.

As for others, of lesser duration and deliberation, but still deserving of careful study and capable of yielding insights as to how the direct sales section of the comics industry is perceived and what might be done to improve wider comics marketing — "survey says:"

Spending on comics may not be significant ("$10, on average spent on comics per month") but that's "not including magazines, bags, cards, et al." so never underestimate the ancillary income from customers who may be light on buying so-called "core comics."

Interests outside of comics range from magazines (among them TV GUIDE, TIME, PLAYBOY, and VANITY FAIR) to movies and TV (especially including "anything STAR TREK"). According to most respondents, support would be there for more comics published towards those interests, specifically "alternative sci-fi/fantasy as opposed to mainstream Marvel/DC."

How to attract new readers, among them mainstream America?

"Stronger ties with schools, teachers, writers, libraries, bookstores and literature professors; stronger ads." As for whether this could take place via the direct sales market or must of necessity proceed outside the direct sales market, in a word:

"Outside."

There it is again, in round two of our tabulations of reader responses, the unmistakeable vote of no confidence in the current direct sales system — as it shifts, the question necessarily arises: What's left for comics distributors to sell into what's left of the direct-sales comics market?

Games, toys, cards and ancillary items, it would seem.

Talk about killing the goose that laid the golden eggs!

Comics, anyone? — Dave

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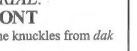

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"We need another X-team because people

Mondo trading card art by Bachalo & Buckingham.

obviously want another X-team?"

GENERATION X

Emerging from the bowels of New York's stand-up comedy circuit to the futuristic world of the comic-book mutantverse, Scott Lobdell has arisen as the *X-writer of the '90s. Having taken the world's most famous mutants across the universe, Scott now turns his attention to creating an all-new, all-different X-team for the '90s. GENERATION X premieres this fall as the prototype of a new kind of super-team. Written by Lobdell and drawn by Chris Bachalo, GENERATION X is expected to take Scott out into his own fresh territory. We recently had the pleasure of chatting with Scott as GENERATION X was at the printers to discuss his past, present and future . . .*

All art accompanying this interview, X-Men, Generation X and associated characters, are TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

"The X-Men have outgrown what origi-

Art by Bachalo & Buckingham from GENERATION X #2.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Scott Lobdell
Born: 24 Aug. 1960 — Marlboro, NY (with 6 brothers and sisters)
Profession: Writer
Education: Three credits away from a degree in psychology
Current Residence: New Jersey
Best Friend: Micha Espinosa — "The Best"
Books Read Lately: FLASH, TAO OF POOH
Hobbies: Stand-up comedy, the art of working

MARK LUCAS: *Why do we need another X-team?*

SCOTT LOBDELL: I think we need another X-team because people obviously want another X-team, or the assumption would be that GENERATION X would not be the number-one selling book for September by nearly a million copies in a marketplace where everything else is dropping off into nothingness as far as sales go. Certainly, the marketing reason is that people want to see more X-MEN. The reason for another X-book is the same reason we don't need to see the "Not-So-Secret Defenders" or "Justice League Tunisia." If we needed to see more of those books, we'd see them. The market wants it. That's why we're producing it. That's on a marketing level.

On a creative level, I think that the X-Men very specifically have outgrown what they once were and what had originally made them exciting and accessible to their initial market, which was people who wanted to see young mutants dealing with their powers. There came a point very quickly when Scott and Jean and Bobby and Hank and Warren learned about their powers and graduated from the school. A few years later, they kinda kept this whole thing going when they brought in Ororo and Nightcrawler and Peter and Logan. Although they were a little older and didn't need as much training to use their powers, they did need to learn to work together as a team. I think mutants learning about their powers is a key part of the X-Men mythos. Just through entropy alone, it got to the point where the students didn't need to learn about their powers. The New Mutants became X-Force. And there is now a gap in the X-Men universe that needs to be filled — that is, young mutants learning about their powers and trying to fit in, in a world that fears and hates them simply because they are different. I think that's very much the reason why we need another X-book and in particular why it has to be GENERATION X.

MARK: *How will GENERATION X differentiate itself from the NEW MUTANTS or the original X-MEN?*

SCOTT: I think it differentiates itself in a lot of ways. I think in the '60s we lived in a time when everybody let their hair out: free love, make love not war. It was about people coming together and every-

"X-Men originally was about coming together."

nally made them exciting and accessible."

"Mutants learning about their powers is a key part of the X-Men mythos."

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"Now we've become a separatist society."

body accepting one another for who they are. In the '80s when the New Mutants showed up, they very much grew up in a world where the emphasis was completely on success. They call it the Greed Decade or the Me Decade. It was the environment in which the New Mutants were raised. It was very much a goal-oriented time of excess. Go back into the '70s and examine the world that Nightcrawler and Ororo and Peter were introduced into. Now in the '90s, we're in an environment where we've politically corrected ourselves into so many square boxes that we've lost track of what the X-Men were originally, their point of origin. Originally, it was all about coming together. Now, our society is such that we're so separated from each other, whether by design or by the fact that we can stay in our homes and order pizza or movies, everything we want. We don't have to leave our homes. We all get socked with so many labels from "Generation X" to whatever the politically-correct term for our gender-specific/political/religious beliefs are. We've become a separatist society. How will this differentiate? It's a different world. Whether it's the Marvel universe or the real world, these are two entirely different time periods. I think that GENERATION X, probably from the very first page, will offer something very different. They'll differentiate themselves simply because they are different. Cyclops was different from Wolverine who was different from Cannonball who is different from Chamber. If the writer and artist do their jobs well, they're going to create characters who will stay around. While they exist in the X-Men mythos, how will they stand apart from the others? You and I are both writers, but I would assume that you write differently than I do, that you'd bring something different to the story than I would. It's the same with these characters. They're going to bring their talents and their powers and all their back history into the books when they step into them. Then, they will definitively be different.

MARK: *What feel are you trying to achieve with GENERATION X?*

SCOTT: It's funny. Everybody says it's the grim and gritty version of the X-Men. But nothing could be further from the truth. I'm trying to establish a sense of hope and optimism into the X-Men in specific and comic books in general, because I think over the years things have gotten incredibly morose. There was a time when heroes were heroes and villains were villains. Now it seems that heroes are villains and villains are heroes. Friends of heroes are cousins to

"It's a different world whether it's the Marvel Universe or the real world."

"X-Men in specific and comics in general

people who were originally villains on their mother's side in a past alternate future reality of their cloned astral self. I'm trying to get away from that. What **Alan Moore** did with WATCHMEN was incredible. What **Frank Miller** did with DARK KNIGHT — both were incredible, very well-done pieces of comic-book art. But over the years, people have taken it to mean that this is the only type of story that can be told, this dark, cynical version of comics. I don't think that's true. The feel that we're going to go for with GENERATION X is trying to bring back — if not the fun, at least the optimism that comes with deciding to use your powers, put on a costume, change your name, and fight for a cause, putting your life on hold and working for a cause greater than yourself. If you don't have that sense that you're fighting for something more, then it's kind of a bizarre thing to be doing it in the first place if you don't have a reason for it. More than anything else, that's what we're trying to do with GENERATION X.

MARK: *You think this is more or less a hopeful series?*

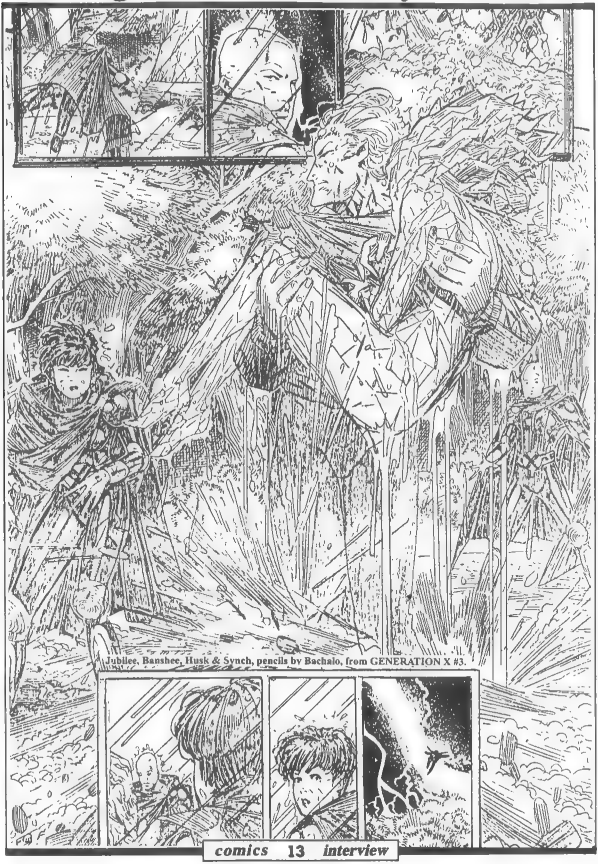
SCOTT: I think very much these students each are coming together from a background where they either have or have not had much experience or had a fairly overwhelmingly negative one with regard to their mutant ability. By bringing them together, they're going to find that they can draw on each other's strengths and sense that, instead of working alone, by working together with people like themselves they can understand that the fact that they're mutated is not a reason to feel separate and apart but rather a cause for celebration. They're going to use those differences to their advantage.

MARK: *I thought it ironic that Generation X is being co-led by Emma Frost, the White Queen. Will outsiders therefore view this team as "evil" mutants?*

SCOTT: Aside from Emma's stated attempt to turn Firestar into a personal assassin, she never has had much of a history of being evil *per se*. Aside from that, Banshee was a super-villain once, working for Factor X, although that was not under the best of circumstances; they tried to blow his head off if he didn't cooperate. You also have Wolverine, who was a psychotic who was carving his initials in coffee tables, theoretically killing Savage Land guards. So I think their tolerance is probably a bit higher. And they (the X-Men) have been outlaws for almost as long as they've been mutants. Whether or not they'll be viewed as an

"GENERATION X is about the optimism of working for a cause greater than yourself."

have gotten incredibly morose."



Jubilee, Banshee, Husk & Synch, pencils by Bachalo, from GENERATION X #3.

"We settled on GENERATION X because

"M" trading card art by Bachalo & Buckingham.

"It's important to stress they're not a team . . . they're a class of students/mutants."

it sounded like 'X-Men, next generation.'"

evil team, I think it's important to stress that they are very specifically not a team at this point. They're the first class of students/mutants at this new branch of the Xavier Institute. My personal feeling is that in the first few issues of the NEW MUTANTS, they very quickly became superheroes in their own right and took the emphasis away from "X-Men in training" and made it the "Junior X-Men" team. That will not be the case in GENERATION X

GENERATION X is about a bunch of students learning to use their powers. Sean himself is not interested in developing a new team of X-Men. His goal is to try to teach these kids how to use their powers. If they want to use their powers to become X-Men or to go into big business or want to take off their costume and never ever use their powers again, that's fine with him. He's not in the business of creating a new farm team for Charles. Because of that, I don't think they'll be viewed as an evil team, because they won't be viewed as a team. Emma, for all her associations with Shaw and the other Hellfire members who were quintessentially evil characters, I don't think she has a history (other than walking around in her underwear) that necessarily stated her as being particularly evil. Having said that, someone cornered me at a convention recently and said she did kill someone who knew something about Firestar's origin or something and figure out how that ties in. For the most part, I don't foresee her as being an evil character, nor do I see any groundwork laid for that. Misguided, yes. Selfish, yes. Determined, yes. But evil, no

MARK: *In today's comics environment, are there really "good" or "evil" characters, or is everybody pretty much in a grey area?*

SCOTT: If you take that question out of the comic-book world, there are clearly very good people in the world and very bad people in the world. There's **Mother Teresa** and there's **Jeffrey Dahmer.** Never the two shall meet. In the same way, comic books can very clearly have heroes and very clearly have villains. That doesn't mean that heroes don't have some faults and the villains don't have some admirable characteristics. But to say they exist in a grey area is not fair. You can very clearly have heroes and villains. In the first issue, M and Jubilee, they're both kind of bratty, used to having their own way. They might not exactly strike people as Wonder Woman caliber heroines. But hopefully, it's something they might eventually grow into. I think they're both good people. I think the villain of the piece is definitely evil.

MARK: *Let's jump back a bit. What was the genesis of GENERATION X?*

SCOTT: I was originally told that Marvel wanted to maintain its NEW MUTANTS copyright. **Bob Harras** originally told me to create a new NEW MUTANTS. I said fine. That weekend,

"Anyone who reads the first issue will see it's something different."

"Comparing this to WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT

the more I thought about it, the more it started to evolve into something completely different from the New Mutants. The decision to take it out of the school completely and move it to Massachusetts. The characters that we were going to use weren't characters who . . . Chamber was a character whose entire face and chest were blown away the first time he tried to use his power. It wasn't going to be Sam and Danielle and Rahne, the kind of cutesypoo X-Men in training. I wanted to tell different types of stories. When I came back, I told Bob I'd do it, but I didn't have any interest in doing NEW MUTANTS over again. We settled on the name GENERATION X because it sounded like "X-Men, next generation." A year and a half later, you can't walk down the street without jumping over the word "Generation X," which is a little unfortunate but works to the marketing department's advantage. The more I thought about developing it, I realized it wasn't NEW MUTANTS but something completely different. Anyone who reads the first issue will see it's something different. I just got done writing the fourth issue. It's a different type of Christmas story, something we haven't seen in the X-Men in quite awhile. It's drawn differently than probably any other Christmas story you'll see this year. And it has a different point of view that sets it apart.

MARK: *I fondly remember artist Chris Bachalo's Christmas story from SHADE a few years ago.*

SCOTT: He was telling me about that when I was out in California. It probably had more blood per page than a **John Woo** movie.

MARK: *How did Chris get involved in this?*

SCOTT: Chris got involved because I was six pages into X-MEN UNLIMITED #1, which Chris was drawing. These pages were just so amazing that I went into the office to **Bob Harras** and said, "This is the guy that has to do GENERATION X." He agreed 1000%. We called Chris up. He said he really wasn't interested. We were shocked. About three days later, Chris called and said he was interested. Apparently, what happened was that his wife came home. He explained how he passed on doing an X-MEN project. She explained to him that he was going to take it. The world has **Helen Bachalo** to thank for GENERATION X. Having said that, over the past few months of working together, Chris has gotten very excited about the project. Aside from the characters themselves and aside from the fact that it's an X-related

"There's reason to hope, to fight for good, because tomorrow's going to be better than today."

I'm setting myself up. That's all right. It'll stand up."

Husk trading card art by Bachalo & Buckingham.

"A girl who fires firecrackers from her

"The question was, do we use Jubilee?"

hand will not be voted most valuable player."

book, he and I are very excited about the idea of doing a superhero book that has a message that says there is a reason to hope and there is a reason to fight for good, to get through today because tomorrow's going to be even better. I think for the longest time, that hasn't been the message in comics. That it's a book that a lot of people will be reading, maybe it will do for the comics industry what WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT did, which is to set an example that it's all right to have a positive image in your story rather than this rampant cynicism that we see most every day. I realize that comparing this to WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT opens me up. But it's like that old line, "I knew **Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy** was a personal friend of mine. You're no **Jack Kennedy.**" I'm setting myself up for comparison against two of the most highly-regarded comic-book stories in the last decade. That's all right. I think it'll stand up. Every comic-book company around has been making it a point to rip off the X-MEN. I'm hoping we'll set a new template. People can rip off GENERATION X for the next ten years. That's the goal.

MARK: *Who's inking this series?*

SCOTT: Mark Buckingham.

MARK: *How did you develop the composition of the team? Banshee's leading the team. Why him? Why put Jubilee in?*

SCOTT: Sean was very much a character to put in. You have your vigilante character. You have your Superman character. You have your undersea guy. You have your bow-and-arrow guy. All these superhero icons you see on both sides of the fence, at Marvel and DC. For every Aquaman, there's a Sub-Mariner. For every Green Arrow, there's a Hawkeye. One of the most primal examples in the superhero is the sound guy with the voice powers. For years and years, Banshee has totally fascinated me as a character. Time and again, all they could think to do with him as a character was to take away his power. He'd mope for awhile, then come back. He'd break his jaw then mope for awhile, then he'd come back. To me, he's always been probably one of the most fascinating X-characters around. When I had the opportunity to establish a new team, he was absolutely the very first person I thought of because of his experience and his personality, probably because he's the loudest guy but also the most soft-spoken. His pace and timing has always been very low-key. He struck me. Eventually, it occurred to me that he'd become just another version of Charles, who's sort of the balance of the X-Men group in general.

We decided that we needed someone for him to bounce off against. Since we decided that they'd be attending the Massachusetts Academy, the person who became the most likely candidate was Emma Frost, who'd definitely have a different viewpoint on how to raise these kids.

"There wasn't really any particular rhyme or reason. It's really fun now."

Pencils by Chris Bachalo, for GENERATION X #4.

"Generation X has to exist in the X-Men

From the very beginning, the question was, do we use Jubilee in this group? As I was writing UNCANNY X-MEN over the last year and a half, it became very clear that Jubilee had a lot of growing up to do and had a lot to learn about her super powers. When you're on a team with Storm, who can control hurricanes, and Iceman, who can turn a city block into a giant ice cube — a girl who fires firecrackers from her hand will not be voted most valuable player. So it was decided that, within this context, if the school was going to be opening up, this is where she should go. From a character point of view, she's come to these realizations herself. We didn't want to hit the same note that Kitty Pryde hit. We wanted to come at it with a different point of view, which is in character for her over the past two and a half years. Many times a character will tell you exactly where they're going and what they're going to do. You just go there with them. That was what happened with Jubilee.

As far as the rest of the characters go, there was really no rhyme or reason to the creation of the characters. What Chris and I did was very specifically create characters that we thought were interesting. Mondo was a character, for example, who should be a big guy but isn't the strong guy of the team. He's not our Colossus. Chris drew that first picture, and it was very clear that this was the big muscle guy on the team. We didn't want to look like every other team. We didn't want to *be* every other team. We didn't want the characters to act out like other characters had before. So the next drawing came back with Mondo in a Hawaiian T-shirt, not looking anything like the typical strong man of the team. If anything, we may have kept an eye towards not looking like anything else. But specifically, our goal was to create exceptionally interesting and different characters. There wasn't really any particular rhyme or reason. We didn't create a character and say, now we need to invent a character against that. Instead, it was,

Universe and interact. It's important."

Skin trading card art by Bachalo & Buckingham

"For the X-MEN you have not only free-

Cover pencils for GENERATION X #3 by Chris Bachalo.

dom but responsibility. It's not a problem."

she was cool, she was interesting, she was different. It's really fun now, because both Chris and I see them interacting with each other. He did one sketch of practically all the characters. That was it. There was nothing else written or drawn about the characters until we started GENERATION X #1. We didn't spend a lot of time making the characters stale for ourselves. We just put them all together and waited to see what happened. Having said that, the "Phalanx Covenant," which introduces the characters, came about after we started working on GENERATION X.

MARK: *Beyond the "Phalanx Covenant," how much interaction will Generation X have with the Marvel universe?*

SCOTT: More likely than not, I think the characters will be shanghaied by all the other editors in the Marvel universe eventually. But for right now, there are no plans for anyone coming into the GENERATION X book. What characters make it out into the rest of the Marvel Universe is not for me to say. There's a cross-over coming up. The debate was, do we make GENERATION X, which is a fairly new book, part of the crossover at a time where it could disrupt the flow of the book? We decided that we definitely had to. In the past, we've had books in the X-Men Universe, most clearly EXCALIBUR, which had nothing to do with the rest of the X-Men Universe, and which suffered tremendously because of that. What you're saying to the fans of the X-MEN, who are the same people who follow GENERATION X, is that this book is not important. Nothing is happening in this book that has anything to do with anything else. I think, while that might be the advantage to other books, as with fin. X-Man II, VALIANT and I think Generation X has to exist in the X-Men Universe and has to interact. We have to know it's an important part. If it's unimportant, why should I read it?

MARK: *What do you see as the future of GENERATION X?*

SCOTT: My ultimate goal is to treat it exactly as the school. After about a year or two, Marvel time, this class of students will move out and a freshmen class of students will move in. Some students will pass, some will fail, some will quit, some will get killed, some might die from other reasons, and some might throw up their hands and decide it's not what they want. Some might feel trapped in the X-Men for one reason or another. A lot of things can happen. What will happen, I don't really have any idea because I don't like to think of a story before I have to write it. If that

Penance trading card art by Bachalo & Buckingham.

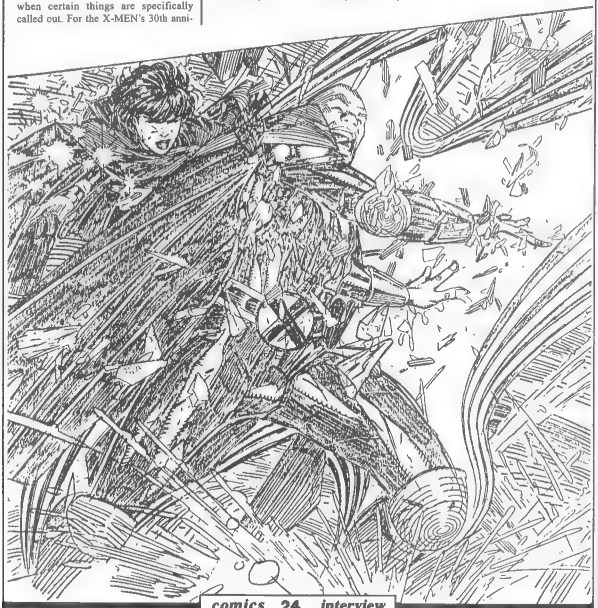
"I got to write every lame and disregarded character in the Marvel Universe."

"There are rumors Bob Harras and I were

happens, by the time I get around to writing it, it's already stale. It's like if you have a date with a gorgeous babe. You have the anticipation for the date. The date may be wonderful. But if you're sitting in a room thinking you're going to have to give her a call and pick her up and drive here and then the waiter is going to whatever, by the time you get to the actual date, it's not going to be the way you want it to be. For me, working on stories, I very much have to let those stories happen at the moment, very much like life works. It's how I take most of the stories, with UNCANNY X-MEN, too.

MARK: *How much freedom for storylines do you have?*

SCOTT: It depends. There are times when certain things are specifically called out. For the X-MEN's 30th anniversary, Magneto has to come back. It's Magneto. On one level, you don't have the freedom because it's a story that brings back Magneto. But the freedom you're given is that you can write the absolutely best "Return of Magneto" story that you can. You have not only the freedom but the responsibility. So there are certain aspects of things that get dictated. But there's no one sitting over your shoulder telling you to do it exactly like this. You're not being hired on to be a typist for someone else's ideas. A perfect example is X-MEN UNLIMITED #1. **Bob Harras** said he wanted a story showing something like the three team leaders trapped in the Arctic where they have to depend on their own powers to survive. I went home and came back with a few ideas. I took that germ and went in different directions. He very specifically wanted a plane going down and three guys in the Arctic. He was giving me an actual story he wanted to see. But based on that one-sentence idea, I wrote X-MEN UNLIMITED #1. Is it my story? Yes, very much. Did it come from an edict from Bob? Yes. But it doesn't change the fact that I was given the freedom to write the story. Some writers in the past few years have felt restricted by the X-MEN Universe and cross-overs. I've never found it to be a problem, even a little. Maybe it's because I write UNCANNY,



friends, and that's how I got X-MEN."

the grandfather of the books. The rest are considered satellite books. Maybe sometimes people feel restricted writing the other books. I know I didn't when I wrote X-FACTOR or EXCALIBUR.

MARK: *You're working with Fabian Nicieza very closely on the two main X-titles. How do you communicate so everything is smooth between the titles?*

SCOTT: We talk a lot. Most of that is Bob's job, as far as keeping the books as coherent as possible. Fabian might call me or I'll call him and say the X-Men will be in Japan this month. He'll be taking Beast and Paylocke and Rogue with him. I'll say fine, that means Gambit's not doing anything so I might use Gambit for those two months when they're in Japan. Or, he might want to use Archangel for a month. Or, Archangel may have broken his arm, so make sure his arm is broken and he talks about the fact that he almost lost half his head in the accident. We keep in touch with each other that way. Similarly, he might see something in UNCANNY that he wants to pick up upon. For example, Iceman's problems with Emma Frost. He wanted to deal with the fact that Bobby's using his powers the same way that Rogue has yet to fully develop her powers. So, he used a scene in the most recent X-MEN based on what I was doing in UNCANNY for a scene of Bobby with Rogue. Since those two were seen on-panel in that issue, it only made sense for me to follow up on that in the next issue with Rogue accompanying Bobby home to Long Island to deal with his relationship with his father. It just comes from staying in contact with each other.

MARK: *Scott Lobdell reportedly got his start in comics with a Beast story in MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS. How'd you get that gig?*

SCOTT: That's a total misrumor. I started in 1988 with my very first sale to SOLO AVENGERS, which showed up later in MARVEL SUPERHEROES #1, a Hellcat story. About a month after selling that story, I sold my first story to MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #9. Over a 2-3 year period, I got to write every single lame and disregarded character in the Marvel Universe, which is probably why people think I sprung full-blown with the Beast. I wrote a Shamrock story, an American Eagle story, a Lockjaw story, an Overmind story, a Sunfire story. The list goes on and on of characters that were totally dismissed. It worked to my disad-

"Bob and I were not friends. Over the past 2½ years we may've become friends."

"People rag on Marvel. It's silly . . . there

Husk and Penance, pencils by Chris Bachalo, from GENERATION X #3.

are corporate be fulfilled."

vantage, because I'd go around the offices and say I'd sold a Lockjaw story. All the editors would laugh and say, "A Lockjaw story? Are you crazy?" It was perfect because there were absolutely no expectations for a Lockjaw or Shamrock story. Because of that, people were surprised to find they were interested in Shamrock, Overmind and Lockjaw. After doing that for about three years, I wound up getting my first 22-page story with EXCALIBUR #31, which had to be written over the weekend. I literally had to call the artist and tell him over the phone what the first five pages were about. It was under that tight a deadline. By the time he had got through those first five pages, I'd gotten through the rest of it and sent it off to him. My first eight-part story which was the Beast. Until then, I pulled an inventory story here and there. But it's funny. There are these rumors. **Frank Miller** is one of those who likes to proliferate this rumor that **Bob Harras** and I were friends, and that's how I got the job on the X-MEN. But I'd actually been writing full-time for four years. It's funny you bring up the Beast. In those four years, Bob and I spoke maybe three times. The last was an argument over the fact that he'd approved this Beast story where, in the first two parts you could see it took place in flashbacks. Once the artwork started coming in, he could see I wasn't experienced enough to be given access to the X-MEN characters. He said I could finish the X-MEN story but I couldn't tell any more of the backstory of the Beast. It wasn't quite an argument, but I was clearly disgusted with him in the sense he kind of changed my story part of the way through. My feeling at the time was, what does it matter if I piss off **Bob Harras**? There's no way I'm ever going to work on the X-MEN anyway. It was a few months later, after **Chris Claremont** had left, that some difficulty within the X-MEN offices as far as deadlines arose. That was the fourth time that Bob spoke with me; he pulled me into his office and told me he needed me to write this issue of the UNCANNY X-MEN. Could I do it? I had 22 pages and two days to do it. He gave me the artwork and his phone number. I went home and stayed awake for those 48 hours. I turned in the work. It was kind of a no-lose situation at the time. If it was really bad, people would say he had only two days to do it. If it was really good, they'd say, "My God, look what he did in two days." Fortunately, it turned out to be good. They were impressed that I managed to pull it out in two days. I managed to get a handful of other ones

An unpublished sketch by Chris Bachalo of Chamber and Husk.

"Comics... the only industry you can get fired and

done under the gun. It was just decided that, rather than having me come in and work under the gun, that I should just do the book full-out. Bob liked what I did. It's become clear over the last two and a half years that Bob and I have an almost identical vision of what the X-Men are. I think it's something he didn't have with some of the other people he was working with. **Frank Miller's** version of events to the contrary, Bob and I were not friends. Over the past two and a half years we may have become friends. If Frank wants to make up stories, he should fill out vouchers for them rather than presenting them to distributors, at Diamond Distributor meetings.

MARK: *At least you're setting the record straight.*

SCOTT: I do want to say that a lot of times people want to rag on Marvel. "Marvel doesn't care about this or that," like there's some Joe Marvel who works behind a desk and makes these edicts that people have to listen to. It's silly, because there's no one person. There are corporate needs that need to be fulfilled. There are decisions that are made that are separate from the wants of the creators themselves. Most of the time, criticisms of the X-MEN come from people who have been let go by Bob. I think he's easily the most talented and dedicated editor in comics today, and the X-MEN have managed to thrive through many different creative teams in the last eight years while sales have gotten stronger and the book becomes more popular. Comic books seem to be the only industry to me where you can get fired and turn around and write a letter that the entire industry is going to read. I'd like people to know that Bob never made comments to the press or raised these issues. He's too professional. The X-MEN are still incredibly popular, and I think that has to do with his contributions to the X-MEN universe. I'd like fans to keep that in mind when they read the negative press.

MARK: *Do you still feel pressure trying to live up to the work of Chris Claremont?*

SCOTT: Not only do I not *still* feel pressure, I can honestly say I *never* felt pressure. It's like dating. It never made sense to me to be jealous. If a person hung out with me, it's because they wanted to go out with me and not someone else. The same is true when I'm writing a book; it's because they want *me* to write the book. I'm trying to write the absolute best stories that I can, whether it's the X-MEN or ALPHA FLIGHT or EXCALIBUR or MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS or a story for DC, my job and my responsibility to myself is to write the absolute best story I can. Whether Chris wrote the book before me or **Stan Lee** wrote the book before him, or if someday I'm asked to write the next episode of NYPD BLUE, I'm not going to think about what the guy before me did or how to measure up to him. My job isn't to measure up to the previous person but to measure up to me. I think Chris is brilliant. I think Chris is a very, very talented person who singlehandedly managed to keep the comic-book industry alive through the '70s and '80s until it became a marketing business, for the most part. I

"Chris Claremont singlehandedly managed to keep the industry alive... until it became a marketing business."

write a letter the entire industry's going to read."

think **Chris Claremont's** contribution not only to the X-MEN but to the comic-book industry is without question and indisputable. Having said that, my job is to do a really good comic, not to try to do another version of what Chris has done. I never felt pressure and continue to not feel pressure. I know that people say I followed **Peter David** on X-FACTOR and **Alan Davis** on EXCALIBUR. From one point of view I'm eager to do GENERATION X because it means I don't have to follow someone and suffer people's constant memories of other people's work. From an outside point of view, I will be happy not to hear it. From a personal point of view, I don't try to write like Peter or Alan or Chris. Years ago, when I was still in comedy, someone sarcastically said, "So, do you think you're going to be the next **Woody Allen?**" I said, "There's already a **Woody Allen.** I want to be the next **Scott Lobdell.**" That's how I feel about comics. I don't think we need another **Chris Claremont.** I think Chris is doing very well doing what he's doing. Hopefully, people will appreciate **Scott Lobdell** for **Scott Lobdell.**

MARK: *How's your comedic career going with your comics career going full steam?*

SCOTT: Pretty much slowed down, almost to a stop since that weekend I did UNCANNY #286. I'm doing, maybe, 8-10 shows a year, which is different from the 40 weekends a year I was performing at one point. Having said that, I recently taped some spots for AMERICA'S TALKING, the cable network. You can catch me there between shows. For the most part, though, my comedy career is pretty much a bobby. Last year, I wrote some jokes for CAROLYN'S COMEDY HOUR and **Jay Leno's** monologue.

MARK: *Is TV a future career?*

SCOTT: Writing TV and film projects is what I'm doing right now. I'm making the rounds and talking to all the studios about superhero-genre-specific movies. I'm also getting some responses to romantic comedy stuff. Because L.A. is the city of hurry up and wait, you just don't know. I can tell you there are things in the works.

MARK: *Where do you see Scott Lobdell in five years?*

SCOTT: I can tell you where I'll be in ten years. My goal in the next three years is to go from comic books to TV movies. I'll then retire at 47 and become a full-time philanthropist and work with kids around the world. I want to spend my

"Last year, I wrote jokes for CAROLYN'S COMEDY HOUR and Jay Leno."

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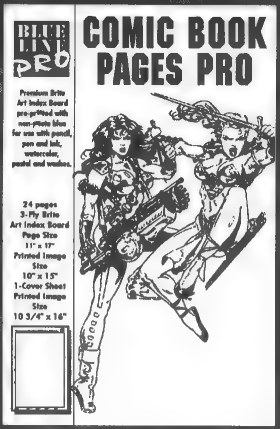
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"'Generation X' is another term for 'slacker.'"

twilight years working with children, finishing the work that Audrey Hepburn started, making sure that kids have clothing and food, are educated and inoculated. Kids are the world's most important natural resource. In a world where there's all this in-fighting and genetic cleansing on one extreme, and New York state can claim it's giving its lottery money to the education system while throughout the financial heyday of the '80s we end up with schoolbooks that say we're still at war with Vietnam and Nixon is still president, it sends out a clear message that people are not attending to the needs of kids. That's something you need money and resources to do. That's something I'll hopefully be accumulating. And where will you be?

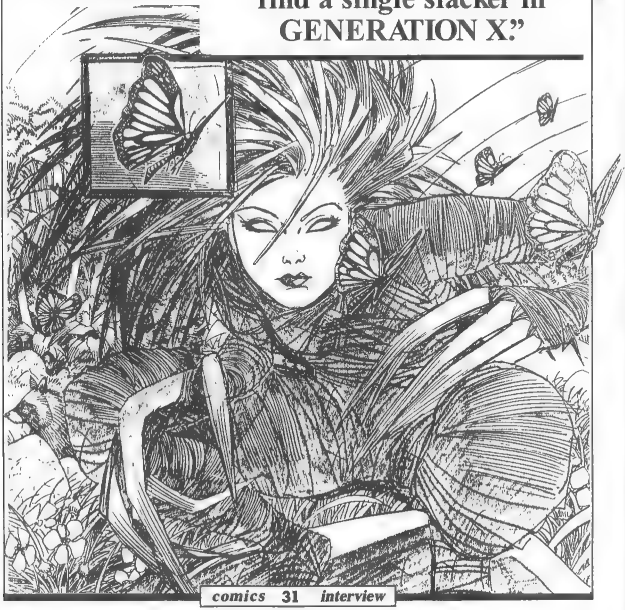
MARK: *Probably talking to you about your work!*

SCOTT: No, you'll be writing GENERATION X by then.

MARK: *I'd like to end by asking, do you see yourself as a member of the "Generation X?"*

SCOTT: I think the media has dubbed it just that. Calling somebody a member of "Generation X" strikes me as making as much sense as calling someone a "hippie" or "yuppie" or one of the labels that have come before. I think it's the most derogatory of the labels. "Generation X" is another term for "slacker." It says that you're lost or hanging, doing nothing. I don't know who came up with the term. I'm sure it describes a handful of people, but it doesn't describe the majority of people in their late 20s. Do I consider myself a member of "Generation X?" No. I think you'd be hard-pressed to think of anybody who does. I can tell you that you won't find a single slacker in GENERATION X.

"I can tell you that you won't find a single slacker in GENERATION X."



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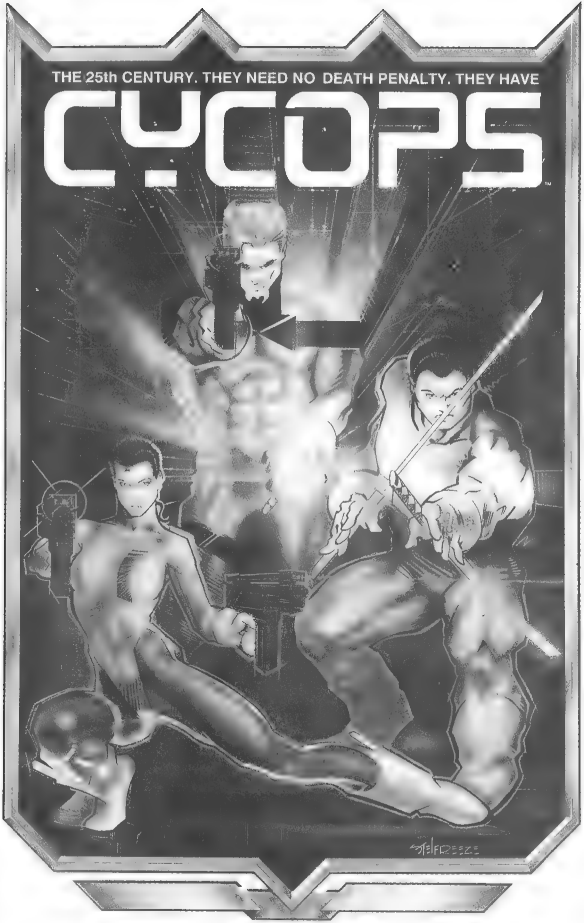
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"I just like strong female characters."

ROGUE GOES ROGUE

Mike Wieringo, previously penciller of THE FLASH and the 1994 X-FORCE ANNUAL, is now working on the ROGUE mini-series from Marvel. Sandra Dincher dropped by Artamus Studios in the beautiful historic district of Hillsborough, NC, to get the latest information on his current work and plans for the future . . .

MIKE: *Supposed* to come out in November. *(Laughter.)* The X-projects run really tight. Sometimes — I don't think they have shipped late. But they run really close to publication.

SANDRA: *So we're looking at November. And then, how many issues?*

MIKE: Four. Four issues.

SANDRA DINCHER: *Mike, I want to ask you about the ROGUE mini-series that's coming out from Marvel, that you're working on. I'd like to know, first off, when is it due?*

MIKE WIERINGO: The first issue is *supposed* to come out in November.

SANDRA: Supposed *to come out?*

"It's a Rogue-with-Gambit mini-series.

Art from ROGUE #1, demonstrating Wieringo's skill at telling the story without words . . .

SANDRA: *On a monthly basis?*
MIKE: Yes. They were talking about making it bi-weekly at first.

SANDRA: *Oh, God!*
MIKE: That's what I said. *(Laughter.)* Because they have a crossover going on in the X-books toward the end of the year, and they wanted to get all the X-Men-related mini-series and specials and stuff like that out of the way, but I guess they changed their minds. Which makes me happy. *(Laughter.)*

FLASH artwork is "not bad" according to Mike Wieringo.

SANDRA: *So, who is the writer for this book?*
MIKE: Howard Mackie He's the guy that wrote the GAMBIT mini-series, and this is really, like, a sequel to that. In fact, I think it originally was supposed to be another GAMBIT mini-series, then they wanted to make it a Gambit-with-Rogue mini-series, then they decided to just make it a ROGUE mini-series, and then finally, *ultimately* it was a Rogue-with-Gambit mini-series. It's really a sequel to the first one.
SANDRA: *So, do you* have *to have read the GAMBIT mini-series for the ROGUE mini-series to make sense?*
MIKE: Uh . . .
SANDRA: *In case there's anyone out*

Photo: Sandra Dutcher

It's really a sequel to the first one."

. . . and emphasizing his accuracy (Mike has the COMBAT AIRCRAFT books in his office).

there who didn't *read it?*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* I don't think it's *necessary.* I've read the GAMBIT mini-series, and this does tie directly into it — but only in the fact that if you're familiar with what's going on between Rogue and Gambit and his ex-wife, Belladonna — this is just, I guess, round two. Belladonna's out for revenge.

SANDRA: *Oooohhh! Cat fights!*

MIKE: Yeah. *(Laughter.)*

SANDRA: *All right, so you've mentioned Gambit. Are any of the other X-Men featured in this mini-series?*

MIKE: I've finished the first issue, and I have the script to the second, and the only other X-Men character that appears *so far* is Storm, in the first issue — but only for, like, two pages. She doesn't play a key role or anything. Actually, what it boils down to is, she tells Gambit he can't smoke in the X-Mansion.

SANDRA: *Well, it's about time!* (Laughter.) *After that letter to the American Medical Association, I should think so! Good girl!*

So — how did you get this particular assignment?

MIKE: Well, I'd been working on the X-FORCE ANNUAL. That had been agreed

Photo: Sandra Dircher

Full page Rogue pin-up pencils by you-know-who.

"Storm tells Gambit he can't smoke in the X-Mansion"

upon almost, I guess, almost a year ago. And when I finally started working on it, DC, when they found out I was doing this annual, started asking me if — they thought maybe I'd leave completely, and they started asking me about all kinds of different things that they wanted me to do, or that I *could* do if was interested in it — and at the same time, I was just trying to, I guess, find out what my options were after this annual. So I was asking my editor on the annual if there would be any more X-Men-related projects I could work on down the line, so I could decide what I was going to do. And what happened is that DC asked me if I wanted to do the CAPTAIN MARVEL series that was supposed to spin off of the graphic novel. And I agreed to it, verbally.

FLASH cover art as pencilled by "Ringo."

"Rogue is an X-MEN character from way

SANDRA: *Now, this is Jerry Ordway's —*

MIKE: This is **Jerry Ordway** writing, yeah. And actually, the only time I *spoke* with **Jerry Ordway** it was toward the tail end of finishing the X-FORCE ANNUAL. We had a really good conversation. It lasted for, like, an hour and a half. And everything was fine — and *ten minutes* after I hung up the phone with him, **Lisa Patrick**, my editor, called me and asked me if I wanted to do this ROGUE mini-series. Now, Rogue is one of the characters that — I wouldn't say I *grew up* with, because when she was introduced I was already in my 20s, but — she's just an X-MEN character from back when I was really reading the books *heavily*. And I just love the X-characters, so I agreed to do that. And I called **Mike Carlin** and told him that I couldn't do CAPTAIN MARVEL.

SANDRA: *How did he take that?*

MIKE: He was really great about it. He understood, because I told him it was because of the character, and not because of the possibility of any royalties or the money. It had to do with the character, and not a monetary aspect of it. He was really good about it. He was very understanding.

SANDRA: *Well, Mike also has a deep understanding of the love of a character — as seen by the way he writes certain things.*

MIKE: He said there wouldn't be any hard feelings, and in fact, I've done other stuff — I've continued to do the covers for THE FLASH, and I'm going to be doing other stuff for DC, so it worked out okay.

SANDRA: *Now, you just mentioned that*

Rare opportunity to compare an artist's actual pencils, in this case Mike Weiringo's . . .

back. And I just love the X-characters."

you were heavily reading the X-books at the time she was introduced. I was wondering how much research you needed to do to catch up to who Rogue is today.

MIKE: I don't really read many comics at all anymore. I didn't really do any back-research for this mini-series. I've kept up with what the characters are doing, and I know that Rogue and Gambit have an ongoing relationship that's sort of always rocking, because they love one another but he's got this wife in his past, who he thought was dead. *(Laughter.)* And they can't touch one another, because Rogue would absorb his powers and probably throw him into a coma if, say, they kissed. If they kissed long enough, she'd put him in a coma and maybe kill him. So there's all this tension going on. And I knew that was going on. I'd read the first mini-series, so I knew the story leading into this sequel. But no, I haven't really kept up with what's going on with the character and the X-MEN books for the past couple of years, ever since I started getting professional work.

SANDRA: *So you enjoy the idea of drawing the ultimate untouchable sex object, is that correct?*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* I guess so, yeah. No, I like her because I like strong female characters. That's why I really enjoyed doing the X-FORCE ANNUAL, because it focused on Danielle Moonstar, and what she's dealing with being part of the Mutant Liberation Front. And I got a chance to re-design her costume; the one she was wearing was one of these little skimpy bikini-type outfits.

SANDRA: *It was atrocious!*

MIKE: Yeah. So I got to re-design the

. . . with another artist's inks, in this case by Terry Austin from ROGUE #1.

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"I don't really read many comics anymore."

costume, make her more mysterious, cover her from head to toe —

SANDRA: *The fringe is nice.*

MIKE: Yeah — sort of the Native American aspect of it. I don't think that was really dealt with in the other costume design — not much, anyway. But I just like strong female characters. Drawing The Flash I've had to draw Wally West all this time, and I haven't had a chance to draw strong female characters.

SANDRA: *Wonder Woman didn't drop by during that run?*

MIKE: No. *(Laughter.)* No, she didn't.

SANDRA: *That's a shame. She's one of my favorites. Okay, so you've got Rogue. How old do you feel she is? How old do you see her? This is one of fandom's ongoing debates.*

MIKE: I guess about — I see her as being in her early 20s, I see all the *new* X-Men characters, I guess not the originals — I'd say Scott and Jean, the rest of those of those characters, I would say they're in their *mid*-20s, maybe 27 or so. That's the way *I* see it. Rogue and Colossus and these characters that were introduced later, I see as in their early 20s — maybe 23, 24 at the most.

SANDRA: *So, a powerful woman, but with a little room to grow emotionally?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah — hopefully! That's the way it's supposed to go. There's always

FLASH cover art as pencilled by "Ringo."

Dragon — one of the last of his race, able to assume the human guise of Mark Dagon.
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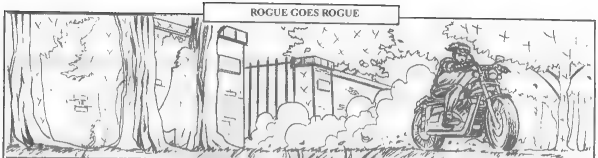
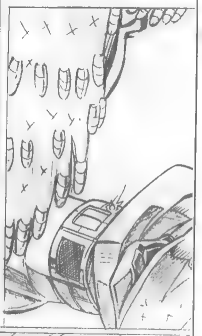


supposed to be room for growth with these characters. *(Laughter.)* That's why they *keep* them in their late 20s or mid-20s as long as possible.
SANDRA: *So, this is one of those things that has always bothered me. When* you *draw Rogue, does her belt fit?*
MIKE: No. *(Laughter.)* It hangs.

Pencils from ROGUE #1 by Wieringo.

SANDRA: *Why?*
MIKE: I don't know, I don't know.
SANDRA: *Why would any woman wear a belt that hangs off of her like that? Real women don't wear belts that way!*
MIKE: I don't know. *(Laughter.)* Someone's idea of fashion, I guess.

SANDRA: *Does she also have the now-famous John Byrne style lock of hair dangling in her eyes constantly, too?*
MIKE: I do that a little, yeah.
SANDRA: *A little?*
MIKE: Not as long as he does, but —
SANDRA: *Not constant?*
MIKE: Not constant.



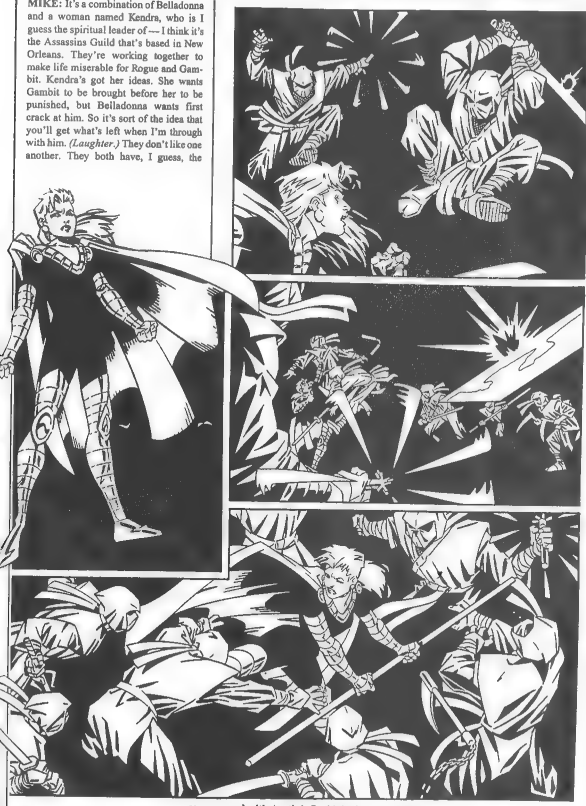
"I haven't really kept up with the X-

SANDRA: *Because that would get knocked out of the way real quick in a fight.*
MIKE: Yeah. *(Laughter.)*
SANDRA: *Good! I am very relieved! So, let's talk about some of the other characters you'll be drawing for this mini-series. Who is our key villain? I assume it's not Belladonna. She's got some interesting aspects, but she's not a key villain.*
MIKE: Actually, she is!
SANDRA: *She is? That's a surprise!*

Another opportunity to study Wieringo's original pencils . . .

MEN books for the past couple of years."

MIKE: It's a combination of Belladonna and a woman named Kendra, who is I guess the spiritual leader of — I think it's the Assassins Guild that's based in New Orleans. They're working together to make life miserable for Rogue and Gambit. Kendra's got her ideas. She wants Gambit to be brought before her to be punished, but Belladonna wants first crack at him. So it's sort of the idea that you'll get what's left when I'm through with him. *(Laughter.)* They don't like one another. They both have, I guess, the



. . . as compared with Austin's final inks from ROGUE #1.

"Kendra wants Gambit punished, but

same goals, but they want to go about them in different ways.

SANDRA: *So you've actually got the tantalizing* trio *of strong women to deal with!*

MIKE: Yeah, this mini-series does deal with, basically, strong female characters. And Gambit's thrown in.

SANDRA: *This is great! Is Gambit really glad there's three women fighting over him?*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* Well, he only knows of two so far. When he finds out the third, I'm sure he'll be happy.

SANDRA: *Deep trouble awaits Gambit! So, does Gambit bother to shave in this mini-series?*

MIKE: No

SANDRA: *How can a man go unshaven so long and not grow a beard?*

MIKE: I don't know. I guess he took lessons from **Don Johnson.**

SANDRA: *Oh, MIAMI VICE meets the X-MEN! A 1970s and '80s throwback!*

FLASH cover art as pencilled by "Ringo."

Belladonna wants first crack at him."

Wieringo pencils from Marvel's X-FORCE ANNUAL #3.

More Rogue pencils by Wieringo.

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ROGUE GOES ROGUE!

Well, let's talk about a few other things. You mentioned your work at DC. A lot of people enjoyed your work on THE FLASH. How long was your run on THE FLASH?

MIKE: Well, it was 12 issues. I had to have a couple of fill-ins because I'm not exactly the fastest guy in the world when it comes to —

SANDRA: *You're not the fastest, but you* draw *the fastest man alive?*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* Yeah. But it took me a year and a half to get the 12 issues done. So that's about six, seven weeks an issue. That's not great, but my speed's picked up since then. So yeah, a year and a half to do 12 issues. But it was over a 14-issue span. I was on from #80 to #92 — and I did Zero, issue #0 that just came out in August.

SANDRA: *I would like to know what you did to become the artist you are today. Did you go to school? Did you get some training? Tell me about that.*

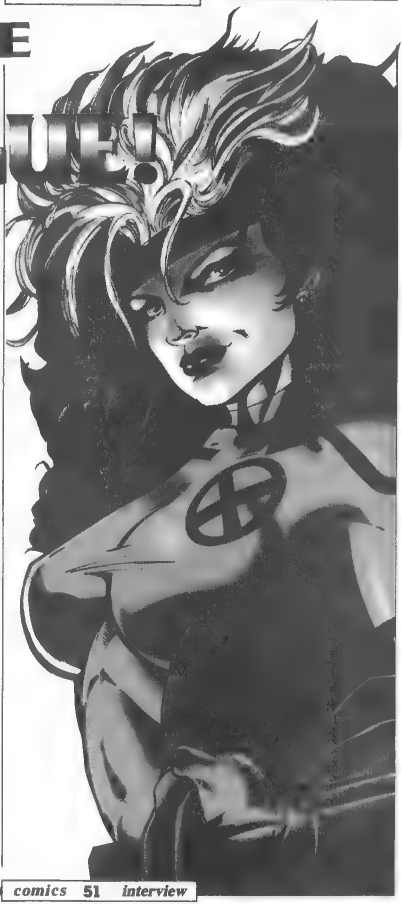
MIKE: I've been drawing — I wanted to draw comics; I knew I wanted to be a comic-book artist ever since I was 11 years old. So I drew constantly from that point on. I gave it up for a little while right after I graduated high school in 1981. I was supposed to go to college; I'd been accepted at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond for an art degree. I was going to be an art major. But my parents couldn't afford to send me. So I guess I lost interest altogether. Since I knew I wouldn't be going to college, I sort of lost interest for a couple of years I was working in the grocery business and I knew I didn't want to do that the rest of my life. So I started saving money and in '87 I went to college.

SANDRA: *Which college was that?*

MIKE: It was VCU.

SANDRA: *And that's in Richmond, VA?*

MIKE: Yes. And I majored in fashion illustration. I still had comics in the back of my mind, but that sort of fell by the wayside as I started getting more and more interested in fashion. By the time I got ready to graduate, however, I found out that the illustration end of the fashion



Marvel promotional ad for ROGUE.

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industry was dying. So I started thinking about comics again. And as soon as I graduated in '91, I started doing samples, to try to get some work. It took about a year. I went to San Diego, the big show, in '91, and I went to some smaller shows, like Charlotte —

SANDRA: *The Heroes Convention?*

MIKE: Heroes Convention in Charlotte, NC, and the DragonCon in Atlanta, and showed my work to as many editors as I could.

SANDRA: *And was that a positive experience for you?*

MIKE: Oh yeah, it was a very positive experience, because it helped me. The times it would get frustrating is when they would give me pat answers, you know, like, "This looks great; keep working," and then shove the portfolio back at me. I wanted them to tell me what was wrong. I wanted a critique; I didn't want positive answers and "Keep working; send me stuff in a year." I wanted to know exactly what I needed to work on. Neal Pozner, who was in charge of looking for new talent for DC at the time, who has recently passed away —

SANDRA: *And much missed!*

MIKE: Yeah, very much missed. He was very helpful. In fact, he's the guy that got me noticed at DC. He shoved my stuff in front of all the editors' faces, y'know, and I eventually got a call from them.

SANDRA: *So, what was the first thing they called you for?*

MIKE: I did a story for JUSTICE LEAGUE QUARTERLY. I did two stories for them. The first story I did for JUSTICE LEAGUE QUARTERLY was printed second. It was eventually printed in issue #13, #14, but the second story was printed in issue #11.

SANDRA: *And what was that story about?*

MIKE: It was about many strong female characters. *(Laughter.)* It was all the women of the Justice League —

SANDRA: *Was this the sleep-over story?*

MIKE: The sleep-over story! *(Laughter.)* Yeah.

SANDRA: *I remember that!*

MIKE: It wasn't presented in a very —

SANDRA: *Lots of loose, baggy men's shirts on large-chested women. Did you enjoy that?*

MIKE: It was okay. *(Laughter.)* I thought maybe the sleep-over scene lasted a little too long.

SANDRA: *As a grown woman, I found it a little bit unbelievable, but it's okay. Did your fashion background come into play in that one at all?*

MIKE: When I first started working in comics, I didn't draw any of my fashion background at all. I sort of threw that away. I pull more from that now, years later. When I first started, I really was kind of overwhelmed and I didn't know what I was doing — which is evident from my first issue of THE FLASH. It was really hard. But now I feel more confident with what I'm doing, and it takes me less time to do, so I can throw in a little more flair. If I want to do something real fashionable, I can do it. I didn't have time to think about that when I first got started. *(Laughter.)*

SANDRA: *What particular methods do you use to create the images that you want to create? Do you use just standard drawing tools?*

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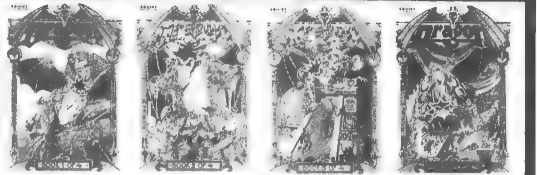

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MIKE: Yeah. I use a drafting lead-holder — I use drafting leads. And I work really small. I do my layouts about 3x5, about twice the size of a trading card. And I use a 2H pencil to do all my drawings on the layouts. And then I'll blow it up. When I work on the art board, I'll use a 4H. It's hard, but not so hard that it can't be erased. That's basically it — nothing special.

SANDRA: *What's your usual preferred panel layout? Do you have a standard design you like, or do you like for your panels to get wild and crazy? Does your character sometimes run across the border?*

MIKE: I think when I was working on THE FLASH — I don't do it so much

"When I started in comics, I didn't know

anymore — there was a running joke here in the studio that I would break panels, almost every panel, as much as possible, every page. But I think that was to cover up the fact that I didn't feel as confident just drawing in general. I didn't think my skill level was up to what it should be, so I'd try to cover it up. *(Laughter.)* To a certain extent, leading the eye into different panels by breaking them in a sequence is okay, but I don't do it near as much anymore. In fact, on this ROGUE mini-

The Artamus Studios roster (left to right): Chuck Wojtkiewicz, Chris Kemple, Craig Gilmore, Mike Wieringo, Jeff Parker, John Lowe, and Scott Hampton (not shown).

Photo: Sandra Chicher

what I was doing — which is evident."

series, I have maybe three or four times in the whole first issue. I don't rely on it that much anymore. I try to rely on the mood and the drawing and the angles — different angles. As far as layouts now, I just try to tell the story, really. If I'm breaking down — I get plots. I think the difference is, with Marvel you get plots and with DC you get full script. So you can pretty much visualize, when you read the full script from DC, after you've read the page you can see exactly what the page is going to look like. So if you want to play around with it and break panel borders and everything, that's fine. But when I'm working from a plot with Marvel's stuff, I have to plot it out on the page. I have to plan out how — they'll give me a three-page synopsis, y'know, pages seven through nine, and I have to try and stretch that out over three pages. So I don't have enough time to play around with a character jumping across the panel, or anything like that. I just do a grid and try to make it as simple as possible. And sometimes I can throw some fancy stuff in there, but I don't worry so much now.

SANDRA: *So you're really helping to write the story, by setting the scene?*

MIKE: In a way, yeah. Everything's suggested, but the specific details — working with **Mark Waid** on THE FLASH, he would suggest not only locales and what would be in an establishing shot, but also sometimes angles. He puts a lot into his scripts; he's very dedicated to what he does — not to say that the guys at Marvel aren't, but theirs is just a different way of working at Marvel.

SANDRA: *Different style. It's a matter of style.*

MIKE: They leave a lot more to the artist than they do at DC.

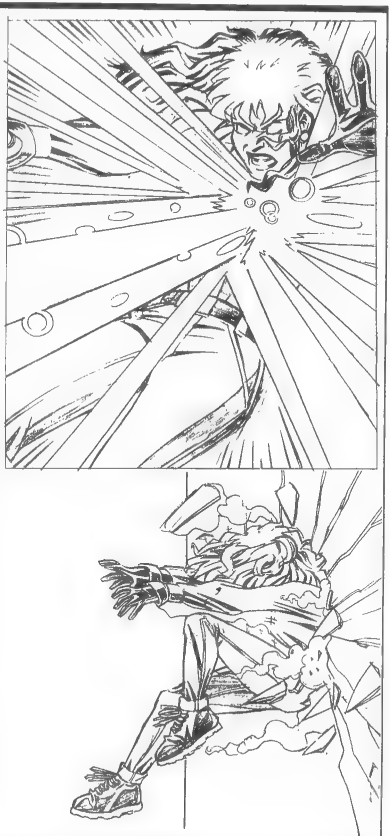
SANDRA: *You mentioned trading cards when you were discussing your panel layouts — your little pre-sketches being double the size of a trading card, but trading cards are hot. Have you ever drawn any?*

MIKE: Just one. I've done one card.

SANDRA: *Which character was it?*

MIKE: A character called Heater — one of their villains. Everybody here in the studio got to do a card. But we didn't get any of the big characters; we got the little villains that make one-shot appearances or something like that. I think the biggest character that somebody got to do, was **Richard Harris** got to do Meathook, part of The Solution. *(Laughter.)* The rest of us got to do little villains. But it was fun.

SANDRA: *Do you like doing trading cards? There's such a huge market for it now; would you like to do that?*



"The ROBIN series, I'm going to be

MIKE: Yeah, I like it. The artwork is smaller. It doesn't take as much time, and it usually focuses on one character so you can put more life, more *character* into the character. Worry about facial expression rather than just trying to make it part of a whole page. I'd like to do more of that. I haven't really been contacted by that many people who do trading cards.

SANDRA: *Well, here's your chance.*

MIKE: Give me trading cards. *(Laughter.)* Ask me to do trading cards, you guys at Image.

SANDRA: *You heard it here first. In the future, what do you think you'll be working on?*

MIKE: Just a couple of weeks ago, I talked to an associate editor at DC. He offered me the ROBIN series. **Tom Grummet**'s going to be leaving ROBIN. So I'm going to be doing that. As soon as I finish this mini-series I'll start on that. I think my first issue will be #16. That should be out, uh, probably early next year. Sometime around March or April.

SANDRA: *Are you going to do any tinkering with Robin's costume?*

MIKE: Oh, no! I love it — I think it's great!

SANDRA: *So his toes are still going to be split in his boots, huh?*

MIKE: (Laughter.) That's okay. That's sort of a martial arts thing.

SANDRA: *So those boots are readily available at shoe stores everywhere now?*

MIKE: I think shoes like that are, yeah. Whenever I see the split-toe thing, I think of the kung-fu movies, where they wear the sandals, and they have socks on underneath them. It splits the toes. So I think that's where it came from. Maybe somebody got confused.

SANDRA: *So perhaps there's no actual advantage to having your big toe separated from the other four lesser toes?*

MIKE: Right — maybe not. *(Laughter.)*

SANDRA: *The world will never know!*

doing that. My first issue will be #18."

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

As comics cognoscenti know, issue #134 was devoted in its entirety to the ongoing Comics Crisis, with cogent critiques compliments of a coterie of industry insiders, including publishers and writers of books with circulations large and small. We asked for detailed individual response in the form of a readers' survey, said responses having been summarized in my editorials this issue and last. However, the following superlative and thoughtful survey response, faxed to us as we go to press, defies a simplified summary and deserves to run here in its virtual entirety. If it provokes you to express your views — pro or con — we'll be happy to run any such responses right here where you, too, can have "The Last Word."

—DAK

SURVEY SAYS: COMICS SHOPS ARE LIKE PORNO SHOPS

AGE: 36.

SEX: Male.

RACE: Caucasian.

OCCUPATION: Laborer and writer.

WHERE I GET MY COMICS: Direct retailers, 97%. Other retailers, negligible, impulse purchases. Mail order: 3%.

WHAT FAN/TRADE PUBLICATIONS I REGULARLY READ: COMICS INTERVIEW.

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WOULD I SUPPORT COMICS BASED ON THESE INTERESTS? Sure.

WHICH INTERESTS? Any that don't have to be approximated too far away from an original medium that they cannot achieve in comics what makes them vital in their original form; for example, comics lacking sound can only approximate music, lacking motion can only approximate dance, so music and dance lose vitality when translated to the comics form. Unless comics can inventively substitute a vitality derived from the comics form, I would probably find the end product lacking and not wish to patronize it. On the other hand, **P. Craig Russell** produces some truly fascinating comics derived from opera, an art form I am not at all interested in; yet, I do support his efforts because as comics they are truly outstanding. So, I believe comics can approximate other art forms when the comics creators are talented, inventive and knowledgeable about the art form being approximated.

WOULD I SUPPORT OR OPPOSE COMICS NOT SUITED TO MY OWN INTERESTS: Of course I wouldn't oppose them. Whether I would support them would depend on whether the end product is interesting to me as a comic. As with **Russell's** opera comics, I buy them even though I'm not at all interested in opera. They are great comics on their own merits.

BREAKOUT QUESTION: I think it is possible for comics to "break out" into the mainstream, and first that can only happen if the comics industry gears a good number of products towards tapping into the interests of non-comics readers. For a long time we have thought of success as being the production of a single product to attract the greatest possible single readership, but in the end that only produces a bland sameness of comics product. Instead, we need to diversify and think about expanding the consumer base with product whose success would

be measured in terms of sales that wouldn't otherwise exist; the ELFQUEST line is a great example of this, because a sizable portion of the ELFQUEST readership wouldn't buy any comics if not for ELFQUEST.

COULD THE "BREAK OUT" HAPPEN OUTSIDE THE DIRECT SALES MARKET, OR COULD IT HAPPEN VIA THE DIRECT SALES MARKET? I think there could be some success in going outside the direct sales market, by gearing comics toward specific consumer groups and then promoting them through retail outlets patronized by the targeted group, like putting music-oriented comics in music shops, religious comics in religious stores, sports comics in sporting goods stores, or even through mail order by advertising such product in periodicals already geared towards those target consumers, such as war comics in military magazines, sports comics in sports magazines, historical comics in history magazines.

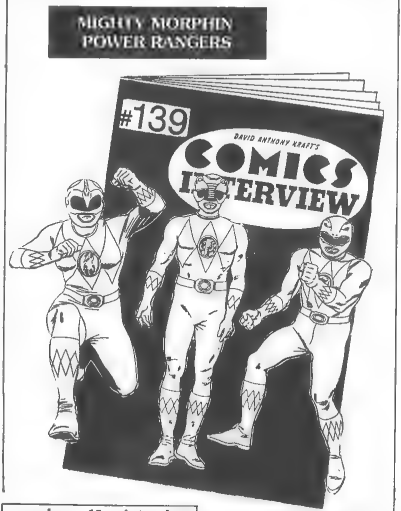
But I think more can be accomplished within the direct-sales comics market, if the retailers will get behind such efforts and try to, at the very least, clean up their act. Comics shops these days are a lot like porno shops in being perceived by most people as existing for a small and off-center clientele, but it doesn't have to be that way! It really doesn't take much to upgrade, mainly just a willingness to do it. Look at it this way: Most parents in this country would not think it unusual for their children to be comics readers; yet if they (the parents) were to step foot inside a comics shop they would find a situation not to their liking. At the very least there should be a section in every comics shop which is a suitable environment for young children, with suitable product of interest to young children.

HOW PUBLISHERS, DISTRIBUTORS AND RETAILERS HAVE TO CHANGE HOW THEY OPERATE TO FACILITATE CHANGE: Where to start? Well, first, comics retailers are the people on the front lines, operating within their local communities, so something they could do to promote more positive attitudes toward comics is get involved and show themselves to be a positive force within their own communities. Generate good will. In fact, the comics industry as a whole should probably band together to generate more positive attitudes towards comics, through something like a goodwill pro-literacy comics-positive program of some sort.

Retailers also need to market the non-superhero books, because it's more important to get new readers than it is to give old readers more product than they can afford. It isn't enough simply to stock comics for a variety of interests. They need to use their window displays and whatever else they can to reach the consumers who would be interested in those books, let them know about them.

Also, I think most retailers have a limited amount of shelf space, so even if they stock the product to do it they would have difficulty breaking it up into genre groupings. But they should have no problem separating the superhero comics from everything else. The shops that carry adults-only comics already segregate that stuff; as small a market share as those comics represent, segregation keeps it viable, helps those who want to find it, while not exposing those books to those who aren't interested. Separating everything else from the superhero titles could really do wonders. If I had a comics shop and didn't have the space to break things up into genre groupings, this is what I would do: mature books on the top shelves, juvenile books on the lower shelves, superheroes on the left, everything else on the right (cross-genre and icon superhero books like BATMAN and SUPERMAN and CAPTAIN AMERICA as a buffer between the superheroes and everything else), adults-only stuff behind the counter.

Also, retailers and publishers need to recognize that mainstream consumers won't think in the same terms as comics fans. Getting mainstream consumers interested in comics will involve a certain amount of rethinking away from the fannish mentality to a more immediate value-per-dollar view. A few years back when **Disney** took over their own comics from Gladstone, **Disney** put out **Disney** comics the same as **Disney** comics had always been, except in a fan-targeted format. While there were **Disney** comics fans who were happy to buy the books, other comics fans weren't much interested, and the kiddies and their parents thinking in terms of value-per-dollar went for cheaper comics, or didn't bother buying comics at all. To some extent the low end of packaging format has to be embraced by the comics industry with the idea being to give the consumers a value in content, and the creative community and distribution will have to embrace this along with the publishers and the retailers.



They still make newsprint, don't they? Hey, publishers and creators, it's paper, you can make comic books out of it. If you really want an archival comic there's nothing to say you can't have that too, just a matter of having the printer change rolls for the last couple-of-hundred or so copies. This isn't to say that all "break-out" comics need to be cheap, only that those which are, all other factors being equal, will stand a better chance of reaching a wider audience. And hey, retailers and distributors, just because it's cheap that doesn't mean it's junk. It's salable product.

Also, we all need to understand that to non-fans who read comics this week's issues won't absolutely become obsolete when next month's arrive. To a first-grader looking to buy a **Disney** duck comic to take home and read (and his parents can be proud of him because there he is reading something he went and got himself to read) any **Disney** duck comic he's never read is as good as any other **Disney** duck comic he's never read. He doesn't care if it's brand new or three months old. Actually, that **Disney** duck comic he read at his friend's house las month, he liked it a lot and maybe that's the one he's looking for.

Something the retailers and distributors might consider is creating a network so that shops could exchange product, so when shop A has too many of an issue and shop B has too few they can help each other out.

The distributors need to clean up their act, too, starting with making their catalogs easy to work from again. Get rid of the cardboard garbage, the endless pages of everything except listings, and load some more useful information in those listings. Distributors need to design their catalogs to assist retailers, like by indicating target audiences somehow. Or maybe just break up the listings into genre groupings and flag target audience information for particular titles that exceed the genre norms.

As for distributors levying punitive fees on publishers, I don't have any problem with the lateness penalty Capital City came up with, which was that product delivered past the due date plus 30-day grace period would be returnable and a small charge to the publisher would be attached to each copy returned; but on the other hand, every returned copy is a financial penalty anyway, so the additional charge seems excessive even if it is small.

But I do have major problems with cancellation and resolicitation fees. If an item is going to be cancelled it should be cancelled as soon as possible, freeing up that much sooner the retailer monies committed to that item. With cancellation and resolicitation fees the publishers are encouraged to try and get the product out without cancelling and resoliciting it, no matter how late it happens to be when it finally comes out. The idea should be that publishers who find themselves with an issue that will be very late, they should go ahead and cancel and resolicit that issue.

Distributors should forget about cancellation and resolicitation fees and just institute a policy that products which reach a certain length of lateness, say 60 days, will automatically be cancelled and need to be resolicited. Then, if the distributors want to levy cancellation and resolicitation fees on product cancelled at the 60-day point, that would make sense.

On the other hand, Capital City's announced cancellation and resolicitation fees were ridiculously high considering that they equally apply to comics Capital City probably doesn't make much more on than $500, if that much. I really doubt that those figures are anywhere near being an accurate tally of Capital City's overhead for just listing a comic and then later on putting that issue on a cancelled list and then later on listing that comic again.

I don't even want to get into how stupid I think an up-front solicitation fee would be. I'll just say it seems to me that's a sure way to financially emburden small publishers.

Last, let's skewer the sacred cow of the comics industry, the company thing. The company thing is the phenomenon where a company's entire line of product is regarded as a single unit. Marvel Zombies, or any segment of fandom which centers around any company's entire output, is a company thing. When a publisher sells advertisement not to single titles but rather to an entire line as a collective whole, that is a company thing. If there are retailers who separate the comics into a Marvel section, a DC section, an Image section, and so on, that is a company thing. And I don't have anything against those variations of the company thing.

But where the distributors have incorporated the company thing into their discount tiers, where all of X's comics get sold at A discount, where all of Y's comics get sold at B discount, where all of Z's comics get sold at C discount, that is where I have a beef with the company thing. From what I understand, the discounts were originally set up for one reason, to make it possible for distributors and retailers to deal with comics that get low orders, to make it possible that a retailer could order as low as one copy of a book and both the retailer and distributor would be able to profit from the transaction.

The thing is, where a low order creates expense for the distributor is simply in handling and disbursement. Measuring the expense per single copy in time and effort by salaried employees, it is more cost-efficient for the distributor to move 250 copies than 100 to a single point of delivery, more cost-efficient to move 100 than 25, more cost-efficient to move 25 than one. So okay, I accept the notion that the discount tiers are advantageous to some extent. What I do not see in this, though, is why a book is measured by the company that happens to keep it rather than by the orders it generates. It doesn't make the least bit of difference whether it's a Marvel or DC comic or a Rip Off or Kitchen Sink comic. All that really matters is what it takes to be able to deliver the amount of product to a single point of delivery.

The discounts should be based on orders, and to that end I propose that the distributors empower the retailers by giving them limited control over what they pay. Naturally, the distributors will have to determine for themselves what the discounts will be and how to break it down so they can still profit from the transaction. But let's say, for purposes of demonstration, that shipping *a* copies is where the A discount makes sense, shipping *b* copies is where the B discount makes sense, shipping *c* copies is where the C discount makes sense, and shipping a single copy is where the D discount makes sense, then it should make sense to break a retailer's order down by how many batches of *a*s, *b*s, *c*s and *d*s it involves. Where *x* equals cover price, and saying the A discount is 55%, the B discount is 50%, the C discount is 45%, the D discount is 40%, and say my order of ANY-COMIC comes out as a total of $2a + 3b + 1c + 4d$ copies: Sell me my order of ANY-COMIC as the total of $(2a)(.45x) + (3b)(.5x) + (1c)(.55x) + (4d)(.6x)$ and I will consider it fair. Sell it to me based on the order I have generated for it for my single point of delivery.

Even better, make it so if my order on this issue reaches A discount level then C and lower batches go up to B, if my order reaches B discount level the D and lower batches go up to C, and so on. And if there's a reason for it which I don't understand, if there is an advantage to incorporating the company thing into the discount tier, then that too should be based on orders generated. Building on the example above, make it so if an issue sells 1.*2c* copies per point of delivery or better then the D discount drops out and every copy to every retailer sells at no less than C discount; if an issue sells 1.*2b* copies per point of delivery or better then the C discount drops out and every copy sells to every retailer at no less than B discount, and if an issue sells 1.*15a* copies per point of delivery or better than all

copies to every retailer sell at the A discount

I realize this discount tier I've described is more complicated than how things are currently done, but the advantages to it are that the rules are the same for every title and publisher, and both the publishers and retailers would be encouraged to move all the books as high up the tier as they possibly can

CAN SUPERHERO FANDOM COEXIST WITH MAINSTREAM COMICS READERSHIP? Sure. In fact, comics fandom can coexist with non-fan readership, and probably comics fandom would grow if comics were to "break out" and become more a part of mainstream America. The heart and foundation of the direct sales market is comics fandom, and that's where the direct sales market should be able to build on what already exists, because comics fandom is more than just superhero fandom. First, let's get rid of the "mainstream" tag we have for comics that aren't of any interest to mainstream America; let's just call them superhero books. And let's dump "alternate" and "independent" while we're at it. Let's start by developing content-oriented views of the books rather than the company-thing views we've been using. Then let's make it easier to be a fan of non-superhero comics, because right now that involves a damn lot of work on the fan's part, so much work in fact that it actually drives true comics fans away from the direct sales market that was supposed to be the comics fandom market, drives some of them away from comics altogether because it's so frustrating.

PERCENTAGE OF NON-SUPERHERO CURRENTS QUESTION: In theory, 100% of non-superhero comics haven't reached the saturation point in potential readership that the superhero books have reached. A more practical answer: 70% of current non-superhero

comics should be able to attract wider audiences if the industry would put in the work to cultivate such sales. I would liken the comics industry to the television industry and say that as cable has allowed a broad diversification of television programming, so too should the direct-sales market be able to allow comics a broad diversification of targeted readership interest. The difference is that instead of trying to pull viewers away from one program to another, comics are better equipped to expand total comics readership. I think the comics which will stand a better chance of growing in sales are those which have some anchor of familiarity for mainstream readers, be that in subject matter or art style or whatever.

NAME ONE: HEPCATS.

WHAT ARE AMERICANS INTERESTED IN FROM OTHER MEDIA? Sex, scandals, humor, celebrities, dead celebrities, soap operas, crime and police, the future, light domestic comedy, high tech, exercise programs, AIDS, real-life heroics, **Stephen King,** self help, environment, government, anything that can be promoted as being in their self interest, wealth, anything that can give them something to talk about to pass the time, abortion, health care, religion, sports, the weather, race issues, women's issues, children's issues, news media concern of the week, strange people telling strange stories about their strange lives, pets, travel, war, poverty, real or imagined natural oddities, conspiracy theories, practical jokes, nostalgia, ways to have fun.

WHAT SORT OF COMICS WOULD I PUBLISH TO ATTRACT MAINSTREAM READERS? Comics taking off on what works in comic strips, tapping into the familiarity of mainstream America with PEANUTS and GARFIELD and CALVIN AND HOBBES. A suspense thriller. A soap opera or anthology romance series dealing with Bigfoot and UFOs and the like.

A fun-to-read character-driven series like GASOLINE ALLEY with characters designed to exhibit strong symbolic traits as in THE SIMPSONS. Well-written social commentary stories like they do on PICKET FENCES. An anthology taking up where today's front-page headlines leave off. A series about real people living real adventures. Anything **P. Craig Russell** would bring me. Political satire. Really, comics should be able to tap into all of the same things that work in other media, all of the many things people find of interest. If I were a comics publisher, I would take into account what works in television, cinema, books, magazines, music, and all the other arts.

WHAT WOULD I DO TO GET NON-COMICS READERS INTO A COMICS SHOP? First, make the shop a friendly environment for anyone who happens to walk in the door; I would get the place fixed up, well-lighted, and keep it clean and orderly. I might even pipe in some nice music for atmosphere; but not that dulling, stupefying canned Muzak they play everywhere. I would try to decorate my shop so that it doesn't seem like a juvenile male fantasy land but more of a fantastic realm of romance and adventure. I would arrange my stock area to befriend the casual browser; I would try to do this by collecting all the product of like interest into specific areas. I would become as familiar as possible with as much of the product that I carry so that I would be better able to direct interested readers towards items similar to what they seem to be attracted to. I would put something in my window display and on my sign to attract the attention of people who aren't interested in the superhero comics. I would involve myself in local events, especially those I could try to use to enhance the fact that comic books aren't just superheroes; I might even hand out free comics at these events. I would try to encourage my customers to tell their friends and co-workers about all the interesting things I have to sell; there's no better advertising in the world than good word of mouth. I would have section of my store specifically designed for juvenile product so that parents would be happy to patronize my shop. I would try to get parents into my shop. If I could, every week I would have a feature sale of a selected graphic album or trade paperback, things that should have very broad appeal, like MAUS or HEART OF THE STORM or COMPLETE BONE or a CALVIN AND HOBBES collection.

MORE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS LIKE IN #134: Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

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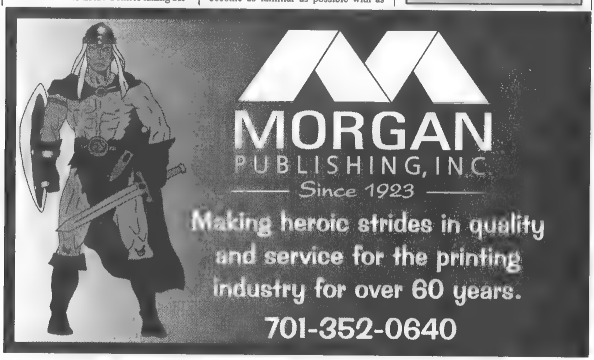
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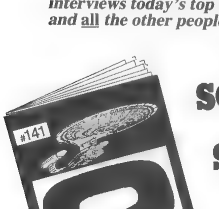

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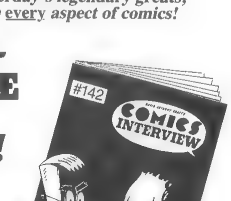

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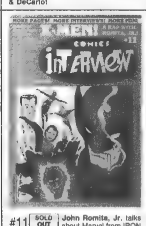

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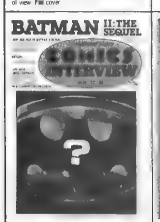

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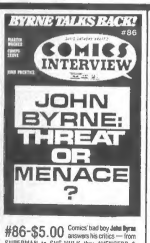

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